

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MANILA 00240 071126Z

44

ACTION EA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 0240

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, RP

SUBJECT: CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS: FR. EDICIO DE LA TORRE

REF: MANILA 66

BEGIN SUMMARY: JANUARY 7 MORNING PRESS CARRIED FRONT-PAGE ACCOUNTS OF EMERGENCY MEETING OF CMLC EVENING BEFORE ON DE LA TORRE. DEFENSE SECRETARY PONCE ENRILE ASSURED CHURCHMEN THAT CASES BROUGHT BEFORE MILITARY WOULD BE TREATED WITH "UTMOST IMPARTIALITY". NOTING THAT INVESTIGATION OF MALTREATMENT CHARGES WAS IN PROGRESS IN CAMP OLIVAS, HE SAID ANY MILITARY PERSONNEL FOUND GUILTY OF TORTURE CHARGES WOULD BE DEALT WITH "SEVERELY". FROM STANDPOINT OF CHURCH, RESULTS OF CMLC WERE "BY AND LARGE SATISFACTORY". ARCHBISHOP MAINTAINING VERY CAUTIOUS STANCE. THE GOVERNMENT'S WILLINGNESS TO PUBLICIZE DE LA TORRE AFFAIR AS IT DEVELOPS BESPECKS ASSURANCE IN ITS CASE AND CONFIDENCE THAT IT IS PROJECTING IMAGE OF REASONABLENESS. ON JANUARY 4, GOVERNMENT FORMALLY CHARGED FR. DE LA TORRE, FR. LAHOZ AND 28 OTHERS WITH "CONSPIRACY TO COMMIT REBELLION." END SUMMARY

1. ALL THREE MORNING PAPERS JANUARY 7 CARRIED FRONT-PAGE ACCOUNTS OF JANUARY 6 EMERGENCY MEETING OF CHURCH-MILITARY LIAISON COMMITTEE (CMLC) FLAGGED IN REFTEL. THE TIMES JOURNAL HEADING PROBABLY BEST REFLECTS IMPRESSION
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 MANILA 00240 071126Z

GOVERNMENT WISHES TO GET ACROSS TO PUBLIC: "MILITARY, CHURCH

LEADERS FORGE PACK". IN FACT, RESULTS OF WHAT PRESS REFERRED TO AS "NO-HOLDS- BARRED CONFERENCE" WERE CONSIDERABLY LESS DRAMATIC. NUMBER OF ITEMS REPORTEDLY DISCUSSED SOUNDED LIKE RE-RUNS OF EARLIER CMLC DISCUSSIONS.

2. MILITARY DELEGATION INCLUDED DEFENSE SECRETARY PONCE ENRILE, INFORMATION SECRETARY TATAD, GEN. ESPINO (AFP CHIEF OF STAFF), AND MCGEN RAMOS (PC COMMANDER). THE CHURCH'S ECUMENICAL DELEGATION INCLUDED BISHOP ALMARIO (HEAD), BISHOP GAVIOLA (CHIEF MILITARY VICAR), SR. CHRISTINE TAN (CHAIRMAN, ASSOCIATION OF MAJOR RELIGIOUS SUPERIOUS OF WOMEN IN THE PHILIPPINES), AND FR. ORTAIZ, S.J. (CHAIRMAN, JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMITTEE). ARCHBISHOP SIN DID NOT RPT NOT PARTICIPATE.

3. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS PONCE ENRILE ASSURED CHAIRMEN THAT CASES BROUGHT BEFORE MILITARY WOULD BE TREATED WITH "UTMOST IMPARTIALITY", AS WOULD CHARGES OF MALTREATMENT BROUGHT BY TWO IMPRISONED PRIESTS. HE NOTED THAT AN IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION IS IN PROGRESS IN CAMP OLIVAS, AND SWORN STATEMENTS HAVE ALREADY BEEN TAKEN FROM FR. DE LA TORRE, FR. LAHOZ, AND OTHER DETAINEES. ANY MILITARY PERSONNEL FOUND GUILTY OF TORTURE CHARGES WOULD BE DEALT WITH "SEVERELY", SAID PONCE ENRILE. THE DEFENSE CHIEF ALSO PLEDGED THAT DETAINEES WOULD BE EXTENDED THE "MOST HUMANE AND JUST TREATMENT", PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO LIVING CONDITIONS, RIGHT TO COUNSEL, AND VISITS BY RELATIVES. IT WAS REPORTED THAT THE DELEGATES AGREED TO CONTINUE TO UTILIZE THE CMLC AS THE PRINCIPAL FORUM FOR CLOSER MILITARY-CHURCH COORDINATION.

4. PRESS MADE MUCH OF MILITARY'S STATEMENT THAT IT HAS RECEIVED REPORTS THAT BOTH FR. DE LA TORRE AND FR. LUIS JALANDONI (RELEASED WITH OTHER POLITICAL DETAINEES BEFORE CHRISTMAS) ARE MARRIED. BECAUSE OF THESE REPORTS (DESCRIBED IN SOME DETAIL IN NEWS STORIES) MILITARY INQUIRED ABOUT CIVIL STATUS OF THESE TWO PRIESTS AND WONDERED WHETHER THEY COULD STILL BE CONSIDERED MEMBERS OF CLERGY IN GOOD STANDING. MSGR. YLLANA, SPEAKING FOR CBCP, SAID CHURCH WOULD LOOK INTO MATTER AND SUBMIT A REPORT TO MILITARY SHORTLY.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 MANILA 00240 071126Z

5. ARCHBISHOP OF MANILA'S OFFICE INFORMED LABATT THAT RESULTS OF EMERGENCY CMLC MEETING WERE "BY AND LARGE SATISFACTORY" FROM STANDPOINT OF CHURCH. BISHOP GAVIOLA HAD AS MATTER OF FACT TOLD ARCHBISHOP SIN ON JANUARY 7 THAT HE WAS "PERFECTLY SATISFIED. WITH MEETING AND WAS CERTAIN MILITARY WERE SINCERE IN WANTING THOROUGH INVESTIGATION OF MALTREATMENT CHARGES.

6. COMMENT. IN PAST, THE GOVERNMENT--UNLIKE THE CHURCH--HAS OBJECTED TO ANY PUBLICATION OF CMLC PROCEEDINGS. ITS APPARENT WILLINGNESS TO CONTINUE TO PUBLICIZE THE DE LA TORRE AFFAIR AS IT DEVELOPS BESPEAKS ASSURANCE IN ITS CASE AND CONFIDENCE IT IS PROJECTING AN IMAGE OF REASONABLENESS. HOWEVER, ANY UNDUE DELAY IN REPORTING FINDINGS OF MALTREATMENT INVESTIGATION TEAM AT CAMP OLIVAS COULD NEGATE THIS "GOOD PRESS".

7. WITH RESPECT TO GOVERNMENT'S ALLEGATIONS THAT DE LA TORRE AND JALANDONI ARE MARRIED, THERE IS NO QUESTION ABOUT JALANDONI. HE MARRIED AN EX-NUN (SR. LEDESMA) SEVERAL WEEKS AGO IN MANILA. AS JESUITS TOLD US, HE'S BEEN LAICIZED". WHETHER DE LA TORRE IN FACT MARRIED "A CERTAIN ANNIE VALENCIA IN A CPP-STYLE WEDDING" IN 1973, AS CHARGED, IS UNCLEAR. FROM WHAT EMBASSY HAS BEEN ABLE TO ASCERTAIN, THE NEW AND MORE LIBERAL LEADERSHIP OF DE LA TORRE'S SVD ORDER IN THE PHILIPPINES UNTIL NOW HAS TAKEN POSITION HE IS PRIEST IN GOOD STANDING WITH BOTH HIS ORDER AND HIS CONGREGATION.

8. ARCHBISHOP SIN, WHILE HE CONTINUES TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT CHARGES OF TORTURE AND MALTREATMENT, IS MOVING WITH EXTREME CAUTION AND IS QUITE PREPARED TO LET JUDICIAL PROCESS DETERMINE GUILT OR INNOCENCE OF FR. DE LA TORRE AND FR. LAHOZ. IN THIS CONNECTION, GOVERNMENT ON JANUARY 4 FORMALLY CHARGED THE 2 PRIESTS AND 28 OTHERS ON TWO COUNTS: (1) "CONSPIRACY TO COMMIT REBELLION" AND (2) ILLEGAL POSSESSION, DISTRIBUTION, AND CIRCULATION OF SUBVERSIVE MATERIALS.
SULLIVAN

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